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AUG

DIGITAL  
EDITION

# SPAWN



McFARLANE  
Patti



**image<sup>®</sup>** COMICS PRESENTS:

# "RIPPLES"



story

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Dedicated to:  
**SAL BUSCEMA**

FOR IMAGE COMICS

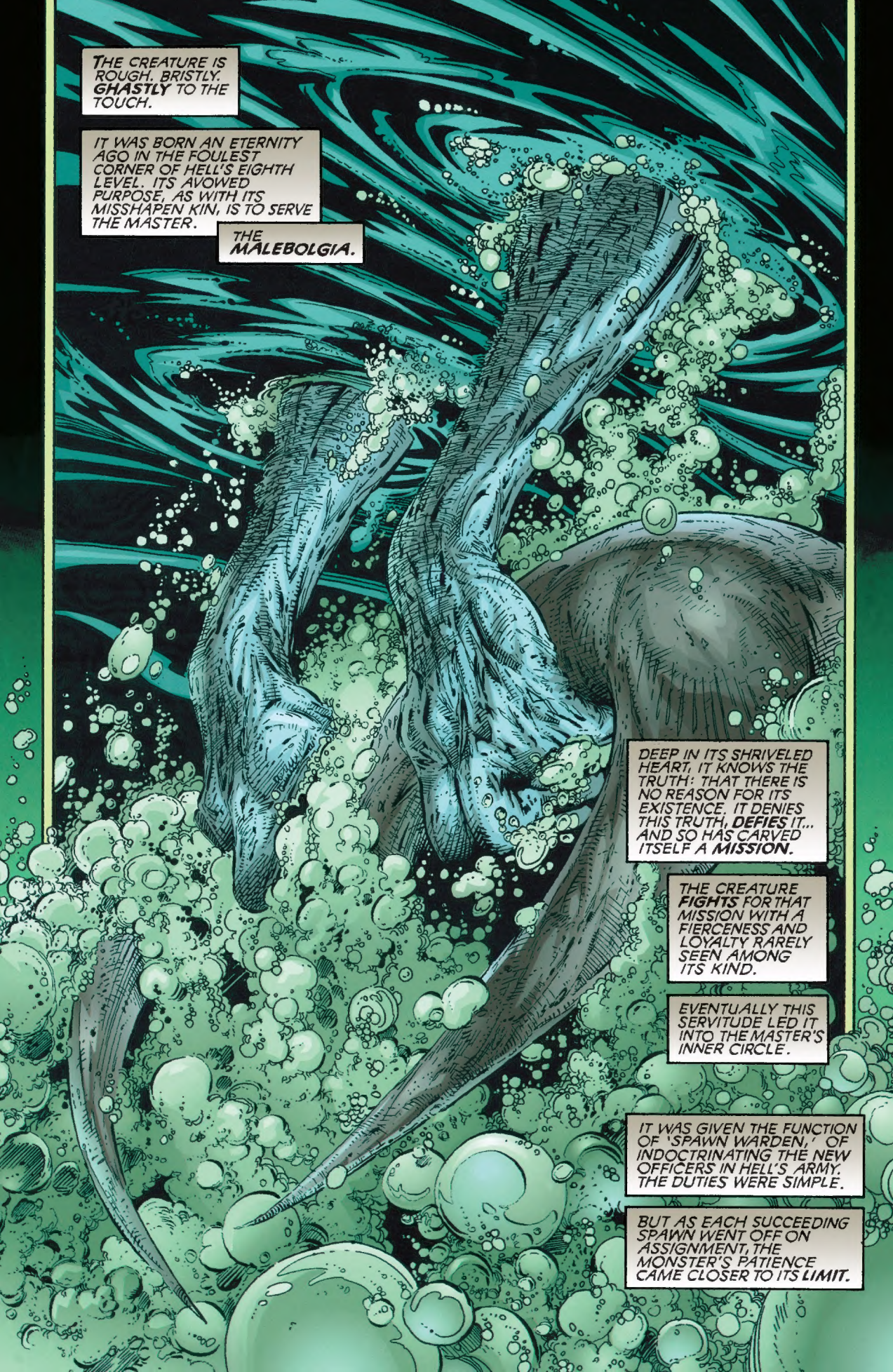
LARRY MARDER - exec. director    TONY LOBITO - publisher

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Graphics Coordinator: JULIA SIMMONS.







THE CREATURE IS  
ROUGH, BRISTLY,  
GHASTLY TO THE  
TOUCH.

IT WAS BORN AN ETERNITY  
AGO IN THE FOULEST  
CORNER OF HELL'S EIGHTH  
LEVEL. ITS AVOWED  
PURPOSE, AS WITH ITS  
MISSHAPEN KIN, IS TO SERVE  
THE MASTER.

THE  
MALEBOLGIA.

DEEP IN ITS SHRIVELED  
HEART, IT KNOWS THE  
TRUTH: THAT THERE IS  
NO REASON FOR ITS  
EXISTENCE. IT DENIES  
THIS TRUTH, **DEFIES** IT...  
AND SO HAS CARVED  
ITSELF A **MISSION**.

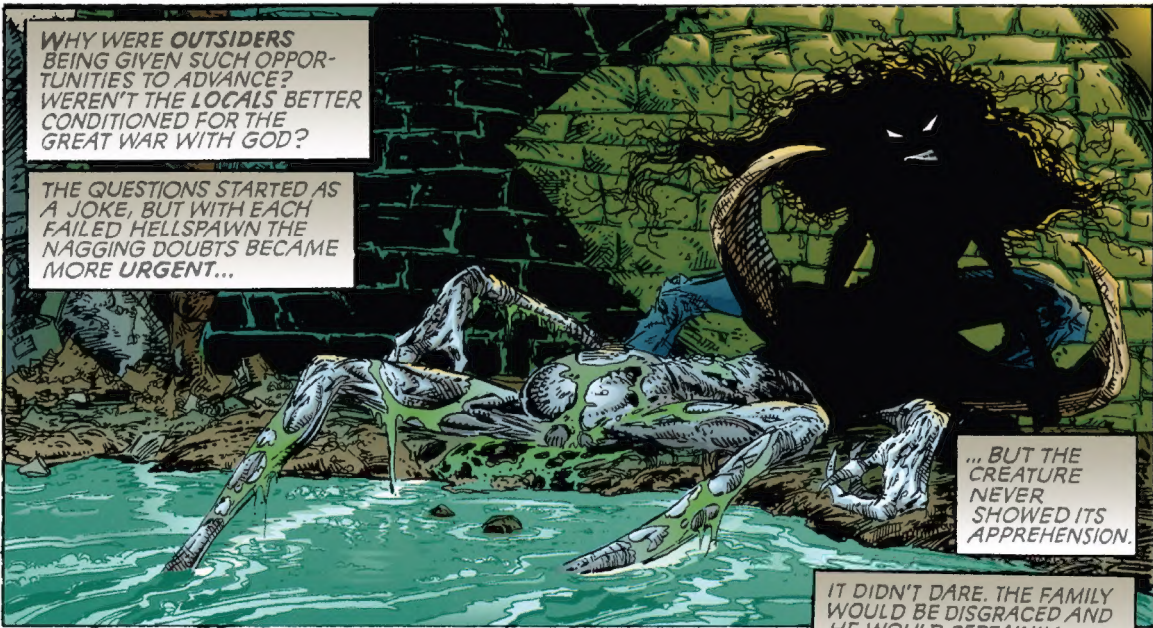
THE CREATURE  
**FIGHTS** FOR THAT  
MISSION WITH A  
FIERCENESS AND  
LOYALTY RARELY  
SEEN AMONG  
ITS KIND.

EVENTUALLY THIS  
SERVITUDE LED IT  
INTO THE MASTER'S  
INNER CIRCLE.

IT WAS GIVEN THE FUNCTION  
OF 'SPAWN WARDEN,' OF  
INDOCTRINATING THE NEW  
OFFICERS IN HELL'S ARMY.  
THE DUTIES WERE SIMPLE.

BUT AS EACH SUCCEEDING  
SPAWN WENT OFF ON  
ASSIGNMENT, THE  
MONSTER'S PATIENCE  
CAME CLOSER TO ITS **LIMIT**.



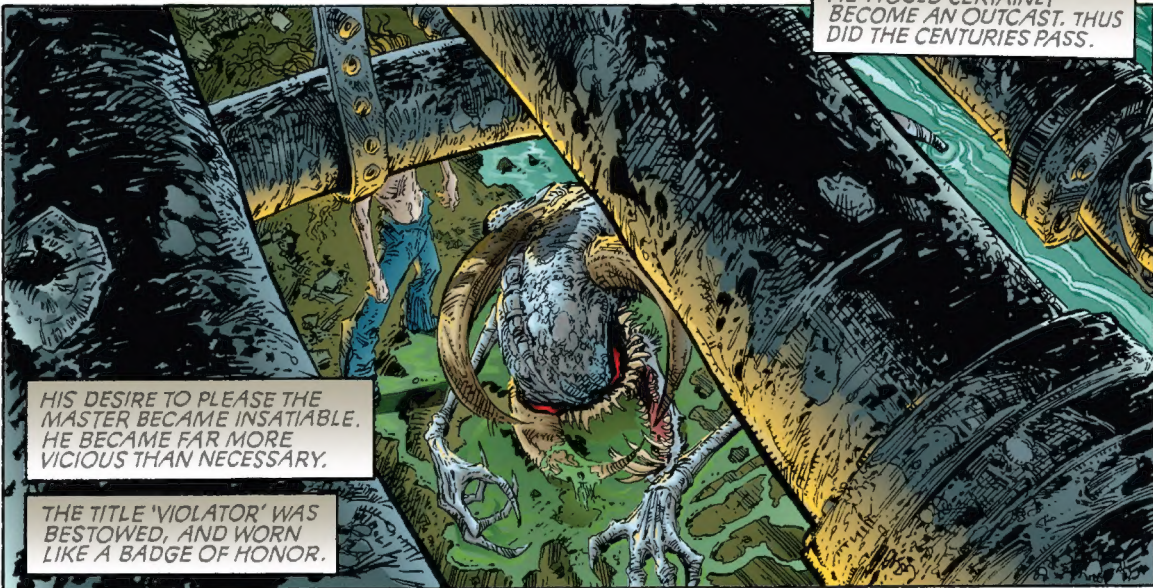


WHY WERE **OUTSIDERS** BEING GIVEN SUCH OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE? WEREN'T THE **LOCALS** BETTER CONDITIONED FOR THE GREAT WAR WITH GOD?

THE QUESTIONS STARTED AS A JOKE, BUT WITH EACH FAILED HELLSPAWN THE NAGGING DOUBTS BECAME MORE **URGENT**...


... BUT THE CREATURE NEVER SHOWED ITS APPREHENSION.

IT DIDN'T DARE. THE FAMILY WOULD BE DISGRACED AND HE WOULD CERTAINLY BECOME AN OUTCAST. THUS DID THE CENTURIES PASS.



HIS DESIRE TO PLEASE THE MASTER BECAME INSATIABLE. HE BECAME FAR MORE VICIOUS THAN NECESSARY.

THE TITLE '**VIOLATOR**' WAS BESTOWED, AND WORN LIKE A BADGE OF HONOR.



THOSE DOUBTS, THOUGH, CAUSED HIM TO STRAY ODDLY ON A PARTICULAR MISSION. HE FELL FROM FAVOR AND WAS BANISHED TO EARTH.

NOW, VIOLATOR'S ONLY HOPE IS TO BEAT THE CURRENT HELL-SPAWN, BOTH PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY.





**HOPPY!**

JUST NOW,  
THAT PLAN  
HAS HIT A  
FEW BUMPS.

THEIR MOST RECENT  
STRUGGLE HAD  
BARELY BEGUN WHEN  
THEY WERE INTER-  
RUPTED BY A RUPTURED  
PIPELINE. SOME CRAZY  
HUMAN HAD THEN SEEN  
FIT TO SAVE THE DEMON  
FROM DROWNING.

**THAT'S IT,  
RUN AWAY,  
EARTH SCUM!**

WHO NEEDS YOUR DAMN  
HELP ANYWAY? I CAN  
BREATHE AIR OR  
WATER...

THE  
SILHOUETTE  
VANISHES,  
LEAVING ONLY  
THE ECHO OF  
SPLASHING  
FOOTSTEPS.

YOU'RE  
LUCKY I'M  
NOT IN THE  
MOOD FOR  
CASUAL  
DISMEMBER-  
MENT.



ANY

OTHER

CLOWNING  
AROUND.

OR

THE GROTESQUE  
TRANSFORMATION  
LASTS BUT A FEW  
HEARTBEATS. LEFT  
IN THE DEMON'S  
PLACE IS ITS BEST  
ATTEMPT AT  
BEING HUMAN.

**FART!**

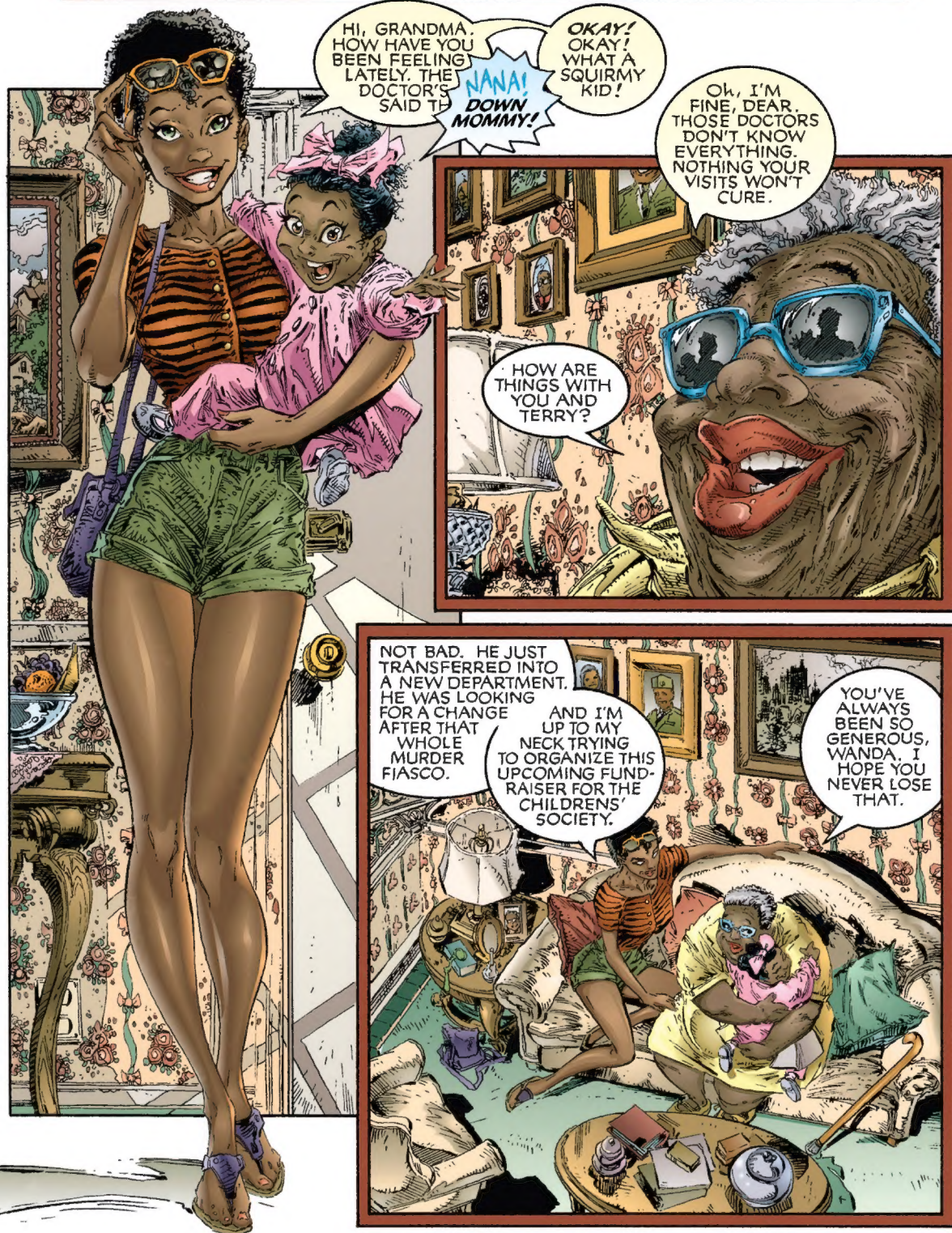
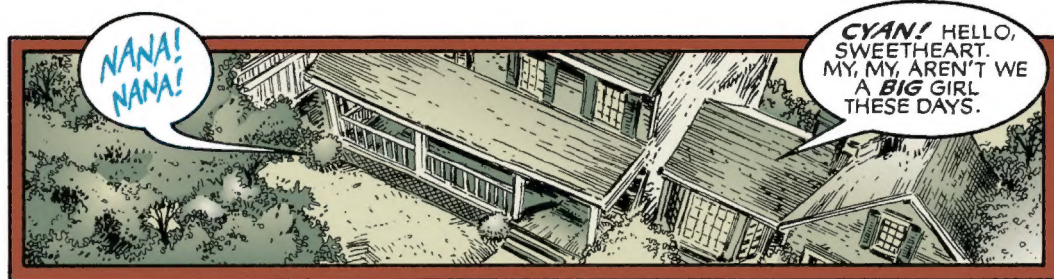
SOMETHING'S  
WRONG--  
**BIG TIME!!**  
AIN'T NO WAY  
SPAWNIE'S UNIFORM  
SHOULD HAVE  
TRANSMUTED THIS  
FAST. THE FRIGGIN'  
THING COULD HAVE  
DONE ME SOME  
SERIOUS  
DAMAGE.

WHICH  
ONLY MAKES  
MY ORIGINAL  
INTENT OF  
DESTROYING  
HIM FROM A  
DISTANCE MORE  
VALID.

IT'S A  
SLIGHT  
CURVEBALL,  
BUT NOTHIN'  
I CAN'T  
HIT.

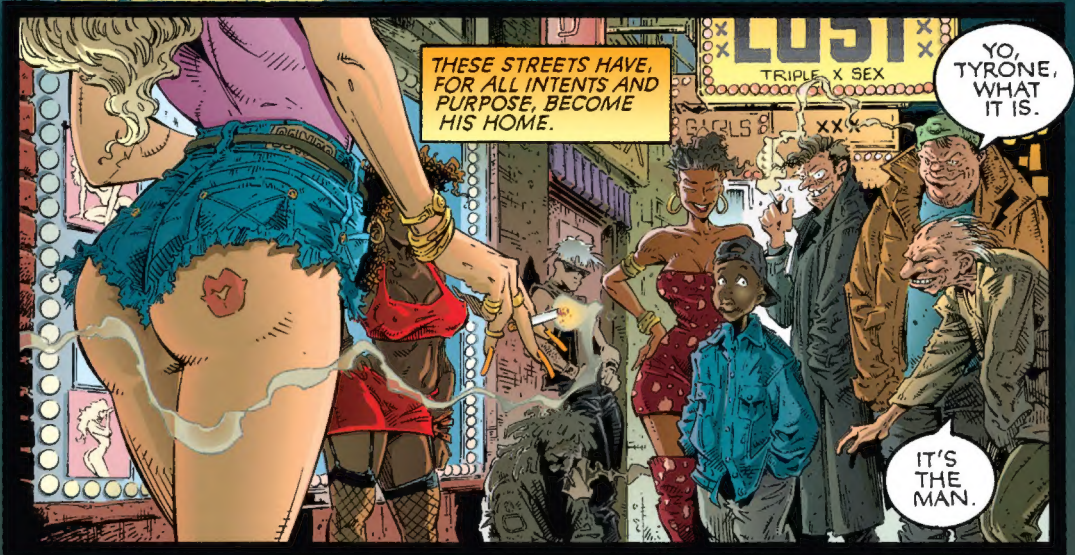
SIX DAYS  
WILL PASS  
BEFORE  
HE ACTS  
AGAIN.







AS ONE CHILD SETTLES INTO HER GRANDMA'S SWEET EMBRACE, ANOTHER AMBLES UNPROTECTED THROUGH AN URBAN CESSPOOL.

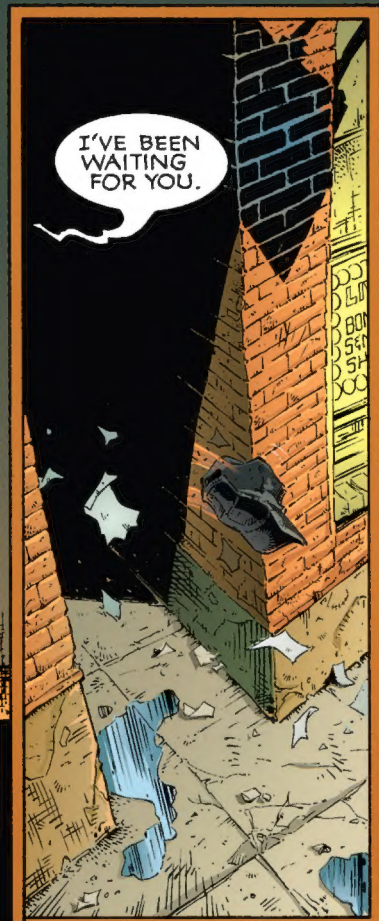


TUGGED AT, PULLED, THE YOUNG BOY BARELY PAYS ATTENTION.

AT TEN YEARS-OF AGE THERE IS VERY LITTLE HE HASN'T SEEN.



HE IS JUST ANOTHER OF SOCIETY'S FORGOTTEN VICTIMS.





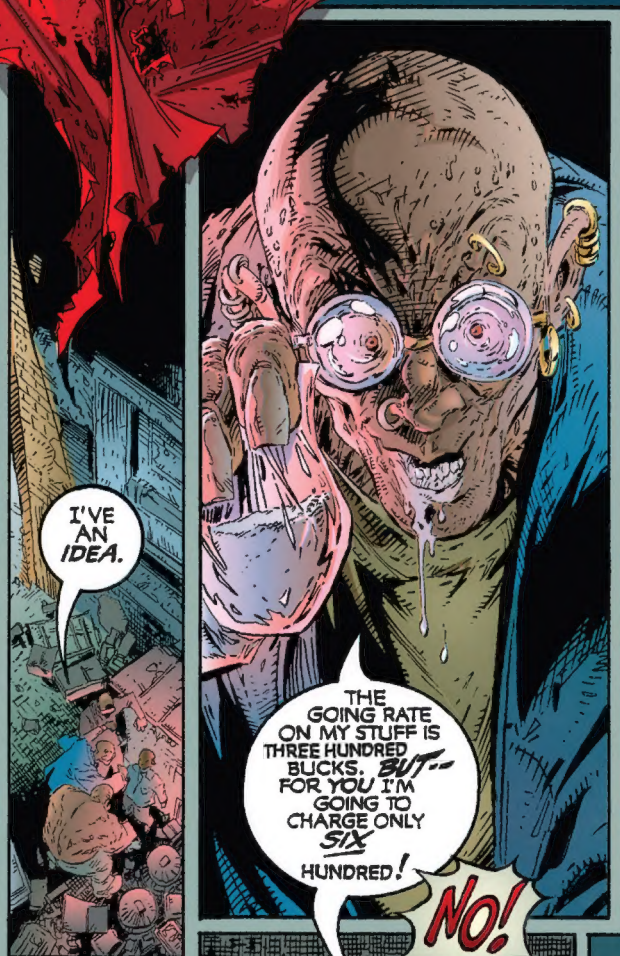


YOU BEEN  
MESSIN' WITH  
ME, TYRONE. I  
DON'T LIKE  
THAT.

SEE, I  
GOT ME A  
REPUTATION--AND  
AIN'T NO ONE  
GOING TO PLAY  
WITH THAT.  
ESPECIALLY NOT  
SOME PUNKASS  
KID.

YOU  
TELL 'IM,  
**STINKY!**

SO--  
WHAT'RE  
WE GOING  
TO DO  
ABOUT  
THIS?



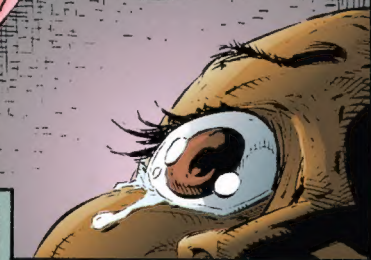
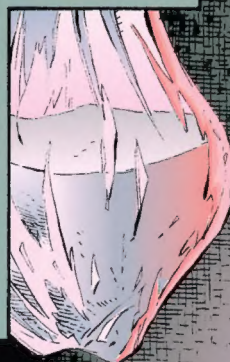
I'VE  
AN  
IDEA.

THE  
GOING RATE  
ON MY STUFF IS  
THREE HUNDRED  
BUCKS. **BUT--**  
FOR YOU I'M  
GOING TO  
CHARGE ONLY  
**SIX**  
HUNDRED!

**No!**

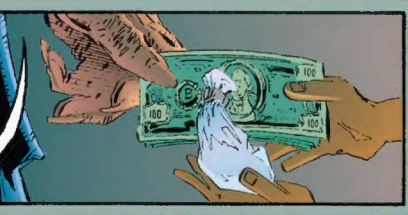
Oh, YES!

THINK  
QUICK,  
BOY! AIN'T  
NO ONE  
AROUND TO  
**HELP** YOU  
CHOOSE.



THOUGH HE'S  
NEVER LET OTHERS  
PUSH HIM AROUND,  
TYRONE DOESN'T  
HAVE TIME TO RESIST.

SO THE DEAL IS DONE.



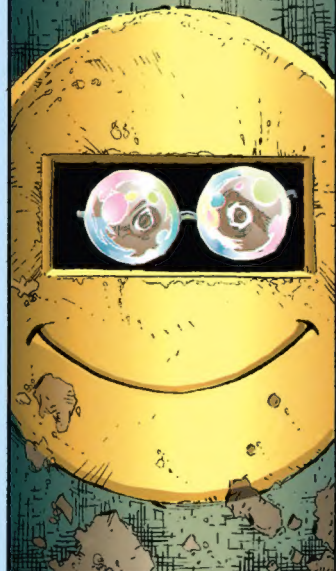
GOOD.  
NOW GET THE  
HELL OUTTA  
HERE. I GOT ME  
**ANOTHER**  
APPOINT-  
MENT.



FOR STINKY, THAT 'APPOINTMENT' IS A SHORT WALK DOWN THE STREET, IN A BUILDING MARKED ONLY BY A SINGLE RED LIGHT DANGLING ABOVE A BLACK STEEL DOOR.

HE SHUFFLES PAST THE MAZE OF AISLES LITTERED WITH PORNOGRAPHIC MAGAZINES AND VIDEOS UNIMAGINABLE TO MOST.

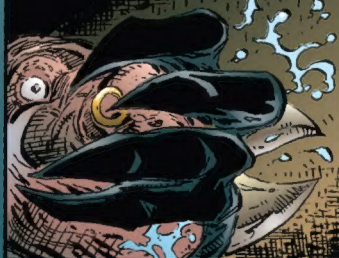
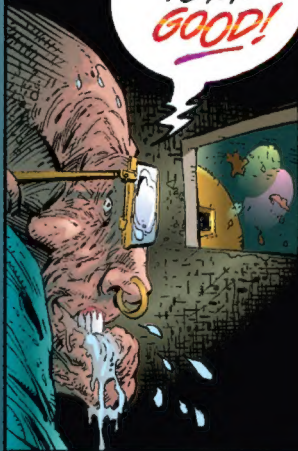
AT LAST, THROUGH A CURTAIN AND UNDERLIT HALLWAY, HE ENTERS HIS PRIVATE CONFINES.



COME ON!  
COME ON!

Oh YES.  
DO IT!

DO IT  
TO ME  
GOOD!

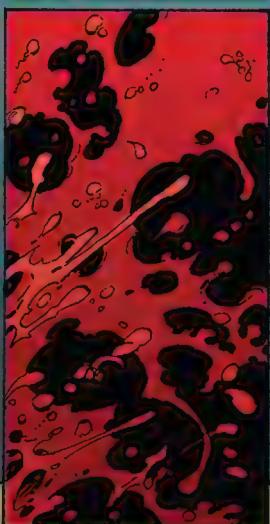
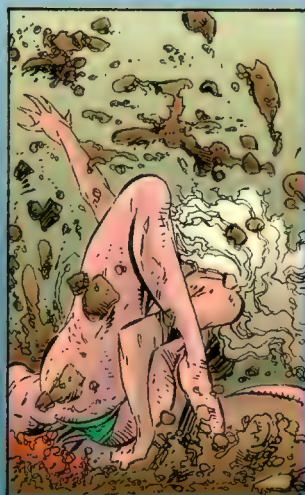
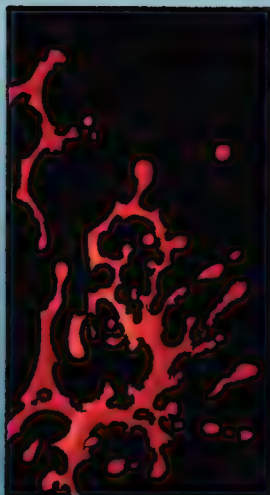
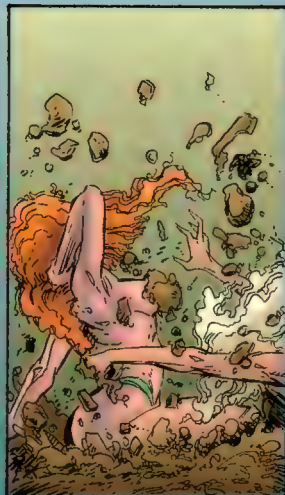


THE NOISES CREATED BY THE WRESTLERS PURPOSELY MASK THE ACTIVITIES OF THOSE HIDDEN BEHIND THESE WALLS.






MUFFLING  
THEIR  
PLEASURE...



AND PAIN.







TWISTED IN BETWEEN PURGATORY AND LIMBO IS THE VAST WASTELAND OF HELL'S EIGHTH LEVEL. THE SHADOW OF THIS BLACK VOID CREEPS FAR CLOSER TO THE EARTHLY REALM THAN WE CARE TO THINK ABOUT.

IT'S HERE THAT THE ARMIES OF THE DAMNED ARE ASSEMBLED AND TRAINED, AWAITING THE SIGNAL TO BEGIN THE GLORIOUS WAR AGAINST THE HEAVENS: **ARMAGEDDON.**

THAT EVENTUAL WAR IS THE ONLY PURPOSE FOR THIS CREATURE, THE **MALEBOLGIA**, ONE OF THE HIGH-RANKING DEVILS. HE OVERSEES THE SWELLING SEA OF TROOPS, AND OCCASIONALLY CHOOSES OFFICERS TO LEAD THEM.

HIS LATEST HELLSPAWN-IN-TRAINING IS COMING ALONG AS PLANNED.

Delude yourself all you wish, Simmons, but you cannot run away from yourself.

There is a reason you were chosen from among the tortured millions.

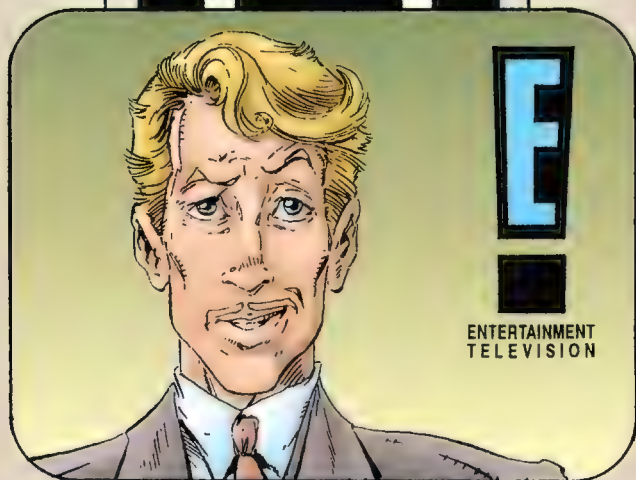
Death. Evil. Blackness. Those seeds were planted in you at birth.

Soon. Very soon. All shall come to fruition.

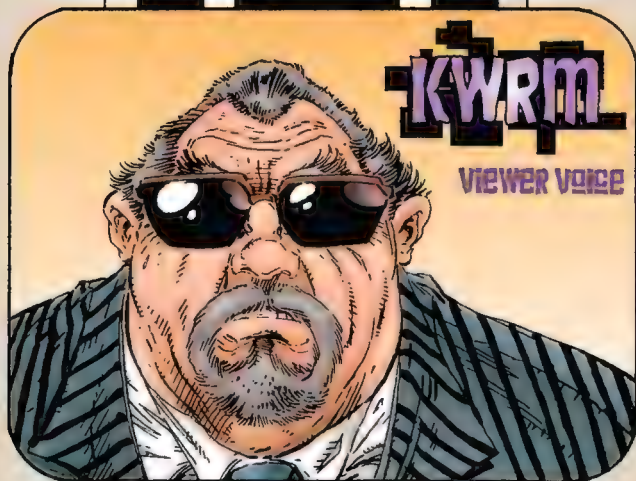




THE SITUATION IN BOSNIA INTENSIFIES AS NEITHER BOSNIAN DIPLOMATS NOR THEIR SERBIAN COUNTER-PARTS SEEM WILLING TO RESUME PEACEKEEPING TALKS. THE PRESIDENT'S MUCH-PUBLICIZED VISIT TO BOSNIA WAS CUT UNEXPECTEDLY SHORT, THREE FEWER DAYS THAN PLANNED. AFTER THE BOSNIAN PRESIDENT WALKED OUT DURING OUR PRESIDENT'S PRESENTATION REGARDING THE ONGOING BORDER DISPUTE, CITING FAVORITISM TOWARD THE SERBS, THE BOSNIAN PRESIDENT ADVISED THE COMMITTEE THAT BOSNIAN PARTICIPATION WOULD RESUME ONLY IF THE U.S. PRESIDENT WAS REMOVED FROM THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. CLOSER TO HOME, POLICE IN NEW YORK CITY ARE STILL INVESTIGATING A GRUESOME MURDER IN THE RED LIGHT DISTRICT. THERE ARE NO REPORTED SUSPECTS AT THIS TIME.



AS THE INTERMINABLE DRUG WAR IN NEW YORK CITY ESCALATES, ANOTHER PAWN FALLS, VICTIM TO A **GRUESOME** ATTACK IN A PORN THEATER. POLICE HAD TO RESORT TO DENTAL RECORDS IN AN ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY THE BODY. SOURCES INDICATE THAT THE VICTIM HAD OVER A **DOZEN** BROKEN BONES. A BLOOD SPATTER EXPERT BEGINS HIS INVESTIGATION TODAY IN AN ATTEMPT TO DETERMINE WHAT, IF **ANY**, WEAPON WAS USED TO SEVER THE VICTIM'S HEAD. OFFICIALS ARE BAFFLED BY THE EXTENT OF THE MUTILATION, AND CANNOT DETERMINE IF THE ATTACK WAS COMMITTED BY A HUMAN OR SOME WILD ANIMAL. EVEN THOUGH THE RECENT **VAMPIRE** CASE HAS BEEN CLOSED, POLICE ARE NOT RULING OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A CONNECTION. IS THIS JUST ANOTHER MEANINGLESS CRIME, OR A REVENGE HIT FOR A DRUG DEAL GONE BAD? BEFORE A MOTIVE CAN BE SUGGESTED, POLICE SAY THE VICTIM'S IDENTITY MUST FIRST BE DETERMINED. CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE. SOUNDS FAIR TO ME.



**BIG SURPRISE.** OUR OVERWHELMINGLY ELECTED PRESIDENT HAS PUT HIS FOOT IN HIS MOUTH ONCE AGAIN, THIS TIME AS HIS PROPOSAL FOR ENDING THE BOSNIAN CONFLICT WENT OVER LIKE A LEAD BALLOON. THE PRESIDENT IS WASTING OUR VALUABLE TIME TRYING TO MAKE HIS MARK IN HISTORY. I GUESS HE'S NOT PLANNING ON RETURNING FOR ANOTHER FOUR YEARS, SO THIS WOULD BE A GOOD OPPORTUNITY. INSTEAD OF GETTING THE JOB DONE, AS **THIS** CITIZEN WOULD LIKE TO DO, HE PUSSY-FOOTS AROUND THE ISSUE, ACCOMPLISHING **NOTHING**. BACK AT HOME, WE KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH SIMILAR PROBLEMS. FOR INSTANCE, LAST NIGHT'S GRUESOME MURDER IN NEW YORK, OBVIOUSLY THIS GUY, ANOTHER DRUG-PUSHING PUNK OR MAFIA THUG, GOT WHAT WAS **COMING** TO HIM. HE SCREWED SOMEONE OVER AND PAID THE PRICE. SHORT. SWEET, AND TO THE POINT, THE PRESIDENT COULD **LEARN** SOMETHING FROM THIS.



AT 2 A.M., INTELLIGENCE DIRECTOR JASON WYNN HAD ASSUMED HE'D BE ABLE TO GET IN ANOTHER PRODUCTIVE ALL-NIGHTER

MANIPULATION OF NATIONAL SECURITY MISSIONS IS BEST DONE FAR FROM THE LIGHT OF DAY.



WHO DARES!

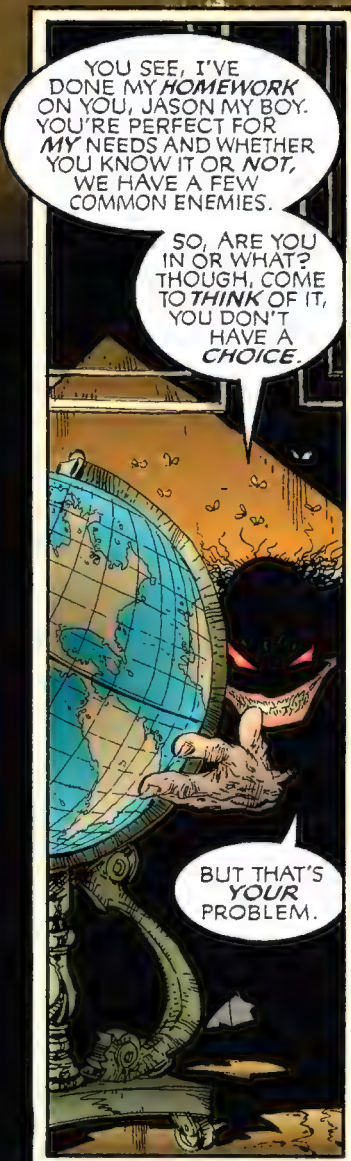
Awww... DECEPTION AND DECEIT. GIVES ME A WARM, *SQUISHY* FEELING.



DOESN'T MATTER.

WHAT *DOES* IS THAT YOU'LL BE WORKING FOR *ME*, STARTING *TODAY*.

AND I'M HOPING IT'LL BE *PERMANENT*.



YOU SEE, I'VE DONE MY *HOMework* ON YOU, JASON MY BOY. YOU'RE PERFECT FOR MY NEEDS AND WHETHER YOU KNOW IT OR *NOT*, WE HAVE A FEW COMMON ENEMIES.

SO, ARE YOU IN OR WHAT? THOUGH, COME TO *THINK* OF IT, YOU DON'T HAVE A *CHOICE*.

BUT THAT'S *YOUR* PROBLEM.



I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU GOT PAST SECURITY BUT YOU'VE JUST MADE A *FATAL* MISTAKE!

FORGET ABOUT THE PHONES. THEY'RE DEAD.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, YOU HAVE A THORN IN YOUR SIDE NAMED *SPAWN*.



COMBINE THAT WITH TERRY FITZGERALD. POLICE CHIEF BANKS. BILLY KINCAID. ET CETERA, ET CETERA, AND I THINK YOU GET MY *DRIFT*.

I'M LISTENING.





GOOD.

OK. YOUR OFFICE CAMERA SURVEILLANCE. YOUR DOUGHNUT-EATING RENT-A-COPS ARE SEEING A PERFECTLY NORMAL PICTURE. YOU ALONE. ALL BY YOURSELF. ANY OTHER SECURITY INDICATORS WILL ALSO BE BLIND TO MY PRESENCE.

IT'S JUST A LITTLE MAGIC THING I DO.

YOU PROBABLY WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND.



TRY ME. YOU'LL BE SURPRISED.

I'M HOPING.

SO HERE'S THE GIG:

OUR BUDDY SPAWN, I NEED HIM WEAK. **SUSCEPTIBLE. RIPE**, IF YOU WILL, FOR THE **KILL**. BUT WE CAN'T DO IT HANDS-ON.



THIS HAS GOT TO BE A STRICTLY LONG DISTANCE BRAIN SCREW. BECAUSE RIGHT NOW HIS SUIT OF ARMOR HAS **ADVANCED** TOO MUCH. REALLY PISSES ME OFF!

SO I NEED SOME ASSISTANCE. WHICH IS WHERE YOU COME IN.

I'M FAMILIAR WITH MOST OF YOUR PAST ACTIVITIES. QUITE IMPRESSIVE, REALLY. KILLING. MAIMING. SPYING. WARRING. **ALL THE GOOD STUFF!**

BUT I CAN OFFER WHAT IT IS YOU'RE **REALLY** THIRSTING FOR: **POWER!**  
-- NO MORE PANDERING TO THE PRESIDENT.



HIM AND HIS ADMINISTRATION ARE DUMBER THAN A SACK OF **HAMMERS**. THEY DON'T HAVE A **CLUE** ABOUT YOUR SECRET AGENDA

LIKE THIS FILE...  
hmmmm...

NAUGHTY, **NAUGHTY** LITTLE BOY. A FULL-SCALE **AIR SWEEP** OF A 'FRIENDLY' ARMY, ENGINEERED BY ONE OF AMERICA'S ENEMIES. IN RETURN, THEY GET A SECRET LINE OF CREDIT WITH A STRUGGLING **DEFENSE CONTRACTOR**.

THEY GET TO CONTINUE THEIR WARS AGAINST YOUR ALLIES-- YOUR INTELLIGENCE AGENCY'S MORE ESSENTIAL THAN **EVER**--

--AND YOU COME OUT WITH TWELVE MILLION BUCKS OF LAUNDERED KICKBACKS IN YOUR SWISS ACCOUNT.

GET TO YOUR POINT.

**TERRY FITZGERALD**. I SEE BY THIS OTHER FILE THAT HE RECENTLY TRANSFERRED TO YOUR OFFICE.

PERFECT. IT'LL MAKE THINGS EASIER. I WANT YOU TO **BEFRIEND** HIM. GAIN HIS **CONFIDENCE**...

...WHILE AT THE SAME TIME DO A NUMBER ON THOSE HE **CARES** ABOUT. A SORT OF **JEKYLL-AND-HYDE** THING.

THAT MEANS HIS WIFE. KID. GRANNIE. WHO-EVER. PUSH THEM. **HARD!**

IT'LL DRIVE OLD SPAWNIE SIMPLY **BATTY!** --WHICH IS A **GOOD** THING.

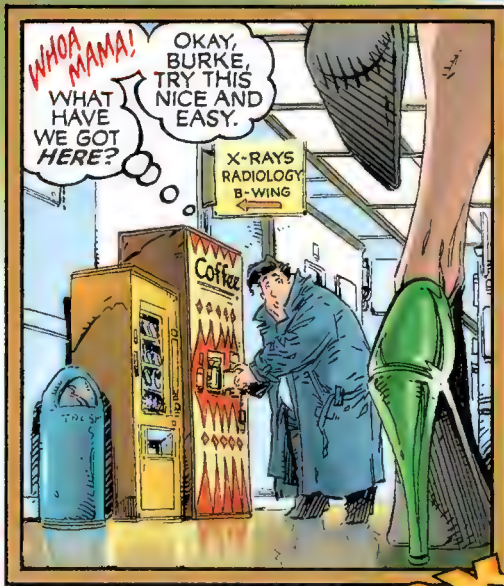
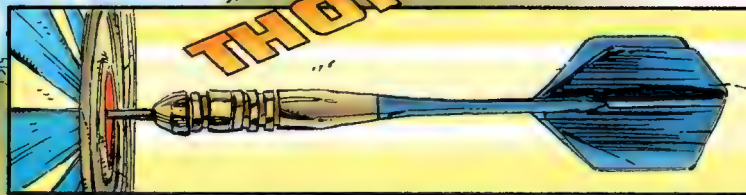
AND WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT I'LL LET YOU **IN** ON SOMETHING.

LIKE WHO OUR HERO REALLY **IS**.

IT'S GOING TO GIVE YOU A HEART ATTACK.  
PROMISE!

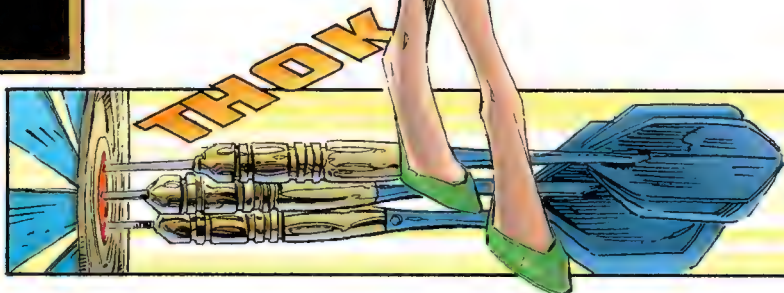
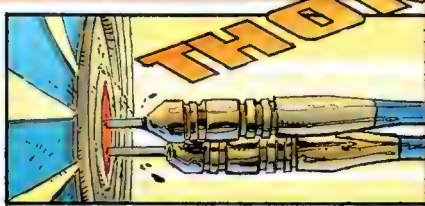


HIS TESTS HAVE ALL COME UP NEGATIVE. THE INJURIES ARE HEALING SATISFACTORILY. HIS RECOVERY IS ON TARGET.

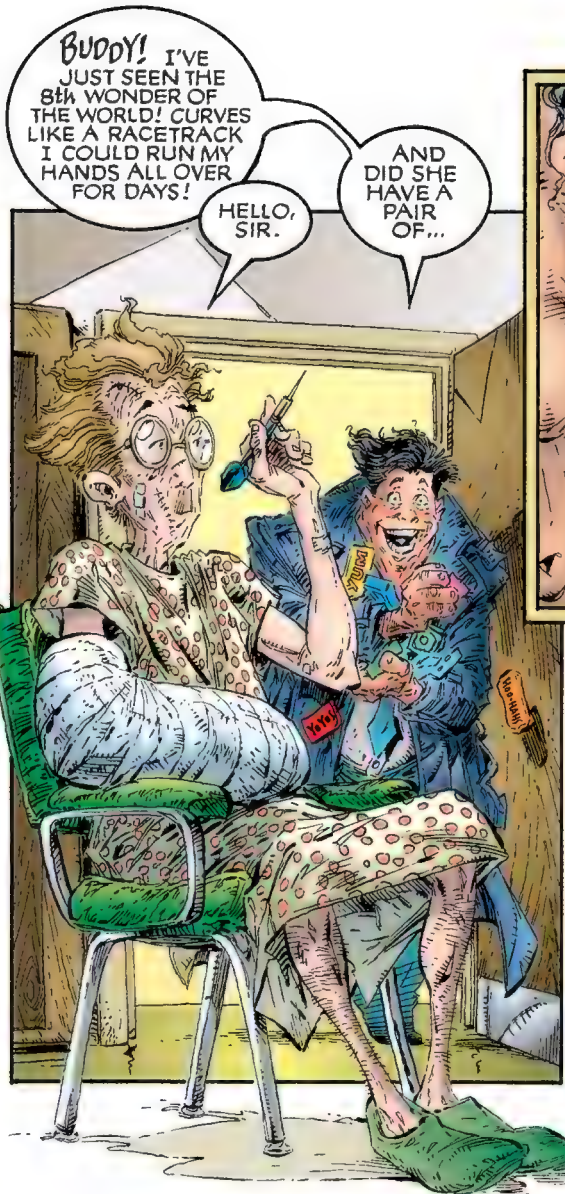


GOOD DAY, MISS. I COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE THAT ATTRACTIVE BREAST... I MEAN... DRESS YOU'RE WEARING, AND WAS WONDERING IF...

SORRY, BUT I'M ON MY WAY TO SEE SOMEBODY. HAVE A NICE DAY.



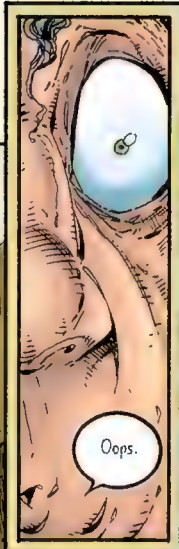




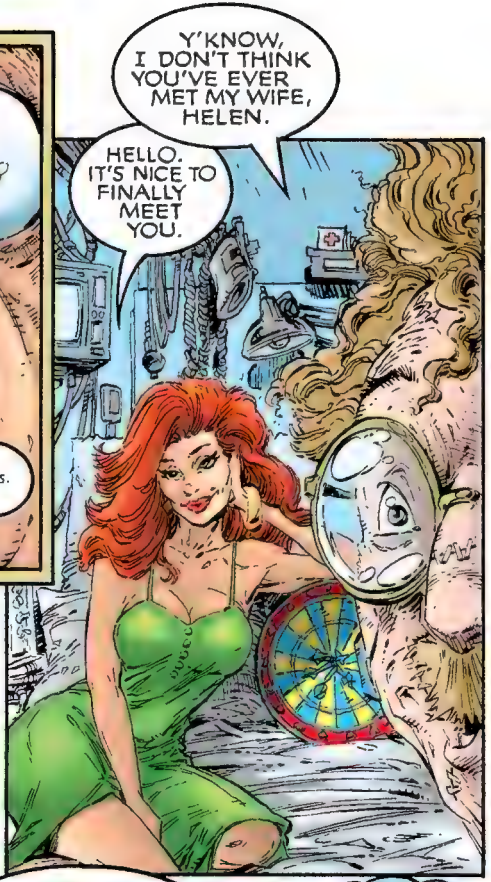
Buddy! I've just seen the 8th wonder of the world! Curves like a racetrack I could run my hands all over for days!

HELLO, SIR.

AND DID SHE HAVE A PAIR OF...



Oops.

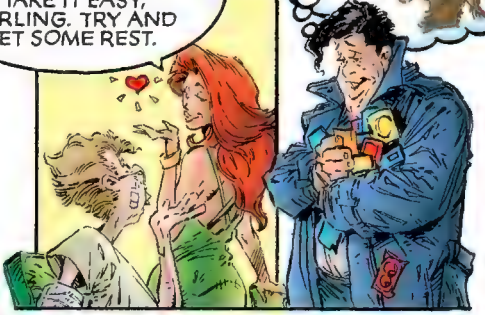


Y'KNOW, I DON'T THINK YOU'VE EVER MET MY WIFE, HELEN.

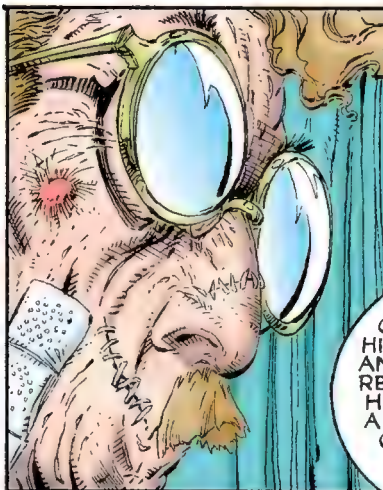
HELLO. IT'S NICE TO FINALLY MEET YOU.

UNFORTUNATELY, I'M LATE PICKING UP TRUDY FROM SCHOOL. YOU TAKE IT EASY, DARLING. TRY AND GET SOME REST.

I'M SUCH AN



SHE'S A CLASSY, BEAUTIFUL GAL, TWITCH. YOU'RE VERY LUCKY.



THANK YOU, SIR. SO, ANYTHING NEW TO REPORT ON CHIEF BANKS?

YEAH. I WAS ABLE TO GET MY HANDS ON HIS PHONE RECORDS-- AND EVER SINCE HE RECEIVED OUR NOTE,\* HE'S BEEN MAKING A LOT OF CALLS TO A CONFIDENTIAL NUMBER AT C.I.A. HEAD-QUARTERS.



HAVEN'T FIGURED OUT WHO'D EVEN GIVE BANKS THE TIME OF DAY THERE, BUT JUDGING FROM THE HOURS WHEN HE'S CALLING, HE DOESN'T WANT THAT MANY PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT IT.



JASON WYNN'S BEEN MULLING OVER THE DWARFISH CLOWN'S VISIT FOR THE PAST 20 HOURS. THE PEST KNEW TOO MUCH. THE PROPOSAL MADE SENSE... THOUGH IT WOULD BACK HIM INTO A CORNER. DAMN.

**BRRING**

MR. WYNN.  
THE PRESIDENT IS  
ON LINE ONE.

MR.  
PRESIDENT?

AFTERNOON,  
JASON. I WANT TO  
THANK YOU PERSONALLY  
FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE IN  
GETTING US OUT OF THAT  
LITTLE 'SITUATION'  
IN BOSNIA.

I'VE BEEN  
ADVISED THAT YOU  
SPEARHEADED THE  
RESOLUTION. I  
OWE YOU ONE.  
THANKS.

UH...  
YOU'RE  
WELCOME,  
SIR...

?  
WHAT  
MISSION?  
I DIDN'T  
SANCTION  
ANY...

**BRRING**

I TAKE IT  
YOU'VE HEARD FROM  
YOUR PAL. WELL,  
CONSIDER IT A LITTLE  
PREVIEW OF THINGS TO  
COME. A DOWN  
PAYMENT, IF  
YOU WILL.

HOPE YOU'RE  
CLEAR ON THE  
SITUATION NOW.  
TOODLE-OO, BUDDY!  
SAY HELLO TO  
TERRY FOR ME...!



A PARTICULAR  
NEW YORK CITY  
ALLEY...

I DON'T KNOW  
WHAT VIOLATOR'S THINKING.  
ATTACK ME, THEN JUST  
DISAPPEAR? DOESN'T  
MAKE SENSE.

OK, NO?  
THEN YOU'RE  
NOT PAYING  
ATTENTION.

MEANING?

I'M  
NOT LIKE  
**HIM!**

REALLY?  
YOUR LATEST  
ACTIONS SAY  
OTHER-  
WISE.

STINKY WAS  
PREYING ON  
CHILDREN. TURNING  
THEM INTO HIS  
OWN KIND. I JUST  
SENT OUT A LOUD  
MESSAGE TO  
OTHERS  
LIKE HIM.

PRECISELY.

AND THAT MEANT  
USING YOUR TRAINING.  
HE DIDN'T STAND A  
CHANCE AGAINST YOU, AL.

HE'S TRYING  
TO CONFUSE YOU.  
KEEP YOU **DISTRAC-**  
**TED.** AND WHEN HE  
DOES THAT, YOUR  
**INSTINCTS** TAKE  
OVER... WHICH  
IS WHAT HE  
**WANTS.**

YOU SEE,  
YOU AND HE  
ARE TWO PEAS  
IN A **POD**  
ON SOME  
LEVELS.

CAN'T  
YOU SEE,  
HELL  
**WANTS** YOU  
TO ACT LIKE  
THIS.

IN SOME  
CASES,  
THEY'RE  
RIGHT.



DAMN YOU, AL! YOU'RE MAKING THIS **TOO** EASY FOR THEM.

HERE, LET ME ENLIGHTEN YOU A BIT. THAT LITTLE BOY **TYRONE** YOU WERE SO CONCERNED ABOUT-- HE **RUNS** THOSE STREETS IN HIS NEIGHBORHOOD. HE'S BEEN IN AND OUT OF DETENTION HALLS SINCE HE WAS **SIX**. BEEN SELLING GUNS SINCE **SEVEN**.

HE WAS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN TWO **MURDERS**, BUT HIS AGE ALLOWED HIM TO CIRCUMVENT ANY SEVERE PUNISHMENT.

AND HE WASN'T BEING STRONGARMED BY STINKY. JUST THE **OPPOSITE**. THE BOY'S DRUG BUSINESS HAS BEEN SLIPPING. HE WAS JUST LOOKING AT SOME NEW SAMPLES.

**YOUR** SOLUTION TO ALL THIS? KILL WHAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. LET YOUR **IGNORANCE** RULE THOSE GOVERNMENT-TRAINED HOMICIDAL INSTINCTS.

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME ANYWAYS, **COG**?

FOR YOU TO **FOCUS!** -- USE YOUR POWER WISELY. LIKE IT OR NOT, YOU WERE ASSASSINATED UNDER ORDERS.

AND-- STOP THE DENIALS. WHAT YOU WERE IS STILL A PART OF YOU. HELL MEANS TO **EXPLOIT** THAT.

THIS ISN'T HOW IT WAS SUPPOSED TO TURN OUT.



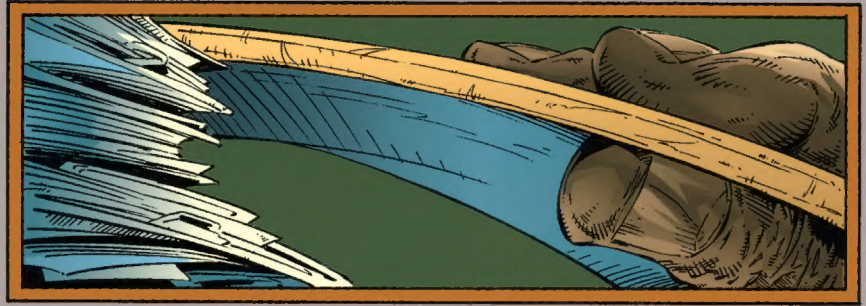


"BECAUSE, LIKE IT OR NOT,  
THERE IS A HOST OF OTHERS  
TANGLED IN YOUR WEB.  
IGNORING THEM WOULD  
WEAVE A LIFE WITHOUT  
PURPOSE."

"YOUR FRIENDS...  
LOVED ONES...  
WOULD FALL PREY  
TO MUCH EVIL."



AS THE DAY COMES TO A CLOSE, TERRY FITZGERALD FINDS HIMSELF ALONE AT HIS NEW OFFICE AT C.I.A. HEAD-QUARTERS.



FINALLY, HE HAS A CHANCE TO PURSUE HIS ONLY REASON FOR REQUESTING A TRANSFER TO JASON WYNN'S DEPARTMENT IN THE FIRST PLACE:

FINDING OUT WHAT HIS NEW DEPARTMENT HEAD IS REALLY UP TO.

THE GUY IS SLICK. RETRACING HIS TRACKS WON'T BE EASY, ESPECIALLY WITH ALL THE SECURITY CHECKS INVOLVED. BUT THERE HAS TO BE *SOMETHING* HERE I CAN USE.

HIS INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES LOOK CLEAN. *ALMOST* TOO CLEAN.

THEN, A NOISE BEHIND HIM SNAPS TERRY BACK TO ATTENTION.





Ah-- THERE  
YOU ARE.

uh... YES,  
SIR, I WAS  
JUST  
FINISHING  
UP... uh...



**MORE WORK?**  
I'VE BEEN  
HEARING HOW HARD  
YOU'VE PUSHED YOUR-  
SELF IN SUCH A SHORT  
TIME. YOUR REPORTS  
ARE **VERY**  
THOROUGH.

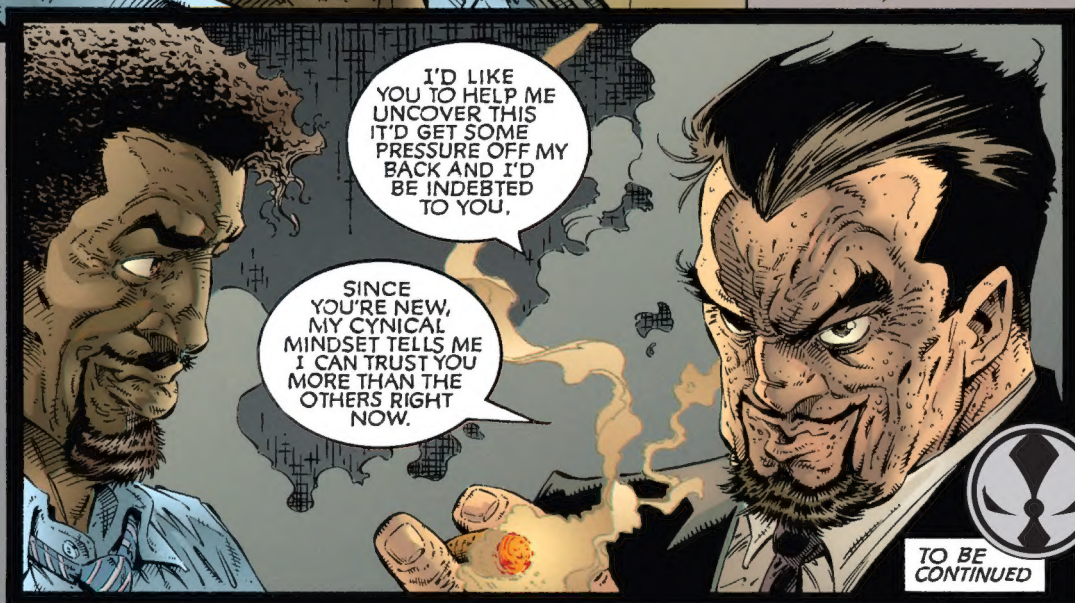
AND SYSTEMS  
ANALYSIS SAYS YOU  
HELPED MODIFY AN  
ENCRYPTED ACCESS  
ROUTE FOR OUR  
FIELD OPS.

IT'S MUCH  
APPRECIATED.

THANK  
YOU,  
SIR.

THERE'S  
ONE OTHER  
THING.

SOMEONE  
WITHIN THIS  
ORGANIZATION HAS  
BEEN PURSUING  
NON-SANCTIONED  
ACTIVITIES, WHILE AT  
THE SAME TIME CON-  
STRUCTING A PAPER  
TRAIL POINTED IN  
MY DIREC-  
TION.



I'D LIKE  
YOU TO HELP ME  
UNCOVER THIS  
IT'D GET SOME  
PRESSURE OFF MY  
BACK AND I'D  
BE INDEBTED  
TO YOU.

SINCE  
YOU'RE NEW,  
MY CYNICAL  
MINDSET TELLS ME  
I CAN TRUST YOU  
MORE THAN THE  
OTHERS RIGHT  
NOW.



TO BE  
CONTINUED





Tyrant  
Lizard  
King

EMPIRE